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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews historical events concerning Memphis City Schools' educational attainments and reports research on changes in schools and in this high poverty district over time. In 1992, the new superintendent focused on improving student achievement and initiated site-based management. Critical partnerships were formed, and in 1995, New American Schools selected Memphis City Schools as a jurisdiction committed to adopting innovative school reforms. District leadership selected eight reform models (including ATLAS, Co-NECT, and Paideia). Elements common to the models included high student performance standards, strong teacher involvement, increased site-based professional development/planning time, and increased use of performance assessments. Schools emphasized cooperative learning, thematic units, student-centered instruction, integrated curricula, technology, and community and family involvement. Data from classroom visits, observations, and teacher interviews indicated that teaching and learning became more active in schools that were undergoing restructuring. The expanded restructuring in 1998-99 spotlighted Memphis as the only New American Schools jurisdiction to implement full systemic reform. When the superintendent left in 1999, commitment to the reform diminished at many schools. Lessons learned from the experience include: teacher buy-in is critical to success, school districts should be active in readying schools for change, one size does not fit all, and schools must own the reform. (Contains 25 references.) (SM)

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AEL Policy BRIEFS

Creating Critical Mass for Restructuring

What We Can Learn from Memphis

Steven M. Ross

In a four-year period, from 1995 to1999, Memphis City Schools was transformed from a struggling inner-city district to one nationally and internationally acclaimed for its success in systemic school reform (Mirel, 2001). In the spring of 2001, the five-year districtwide initiative requiring all schools to adopt whole-school reform models was discontinued; no Memphis school would be permitted to implement its model in the coming year. What happened in association with the initiative, and what lessons can be learned from the Memphis experience that might benefit all schools and school districts?

This paper reviews the historical events concerning Memphis's attainments; reports research findings that reflect changes in schools and the district over time; and finally, presents the author's perspectives on the Memphis reform efforts.[1] While the Memphis story may be viewed as a success by some and a failure by others, it seems critical to learn as much as possible from it to inform educational policy on comprehensive school reform and, in the process, improve future reform efforts.

Historical Overview

Memphis City Schools is the largest school system in Tennessee, serving 115,000 students in 164 schools. Family and community poverty present challenges in the district, as indicated by the fact that 72% of the district's 104 elementary schools are eligible to be classified

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as Title I schoolwide projects. Under current Title I legislation, high-poverty schools use Title I funding and other monies for comprehensive (i.e., "schoolwide") programs that can benefit the entire school rather than only targeted students (D'Agostino, 1999). Also, student mobility in the district is relatively high, ranging from 20% to 40% in most schools; teacher mobility across the district averages more than 20%.

District faces tough challenges. In 1992, Dr. Gerry House, superintendent from a less disadvantaged and smaller district in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was appointed to head Memphis City Schools. Her greatest challenge as superintendent was to improve student achievement. She immediately initiated the establishment of site-based management at each school. The intent was that both individual schools and cluster (multiple-school) leadership teams would succeed in identifying and/or developing effective whole-school/comprehensive school reform programs for improving instruction and learning. However, the challenge of developing and coordinating multiple programs around a schoolwide reform effort proved highly difficult. Most school staffs had neither the time nor expertise to conduct the research and perform the development work required to make substantive changes.

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Critical partnerships develop. As the reform activity began in Memphis, national developments were creating a political climate and funding incentives that soon provided tremendous impetus for House's efforts. Clearly the most influential was the launching of the New American Schools Development Corporation (presently known as New American Schools or NAS) in 1991 (Mirel, 2001; Stringfield, Datnow, Herman, & Berkeley, 1997). As a component of President George Bush's America 2000 education strategy, this new nonpartisan, business-led nonprofit was charged with securing financial support from foundations and corporations to fund newly developed "break-the-mold" whole-school designs. Of 686 proposals submitted in a 1991 competition, 11 received funding, and, of these, 9 were continued through three years of development. Between 1992 and 1995, the 9 teams implemented, tested, and refined their designs in about 150 schools in 19 states (Mirel, 2001).

In Memphis, some critical partnerships were also forming during that period. The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis was expanding its interest in research and evaluation of educational reform programs. In 1994, Dr. Sam Stringfield, an external advisor to the center and a senior scientist at Johns Hopkins University, described "break-the-mold" reform models being developed by the business-led group. He suggested that Memphis schools might benefit greatly by investigating these externally developed, research-based designs. Contacts were made between the district and New American Schools, and later that year the group called for proposals from districts and states to become "scale-up" jurisdictions. In March 1995, Memphis City Schools was selected by NAS as one of 10 jurisdictions committed to adopting these or comparable "break-the-mold" school reforms. The expectation was that within five years, each jurisdiction would have at least 30% of its schools implementing reform models. The Memphis restructuring initiative was officially launched in the spring of 1995.

Designs selected. The superintendent gave Memphis schools the option by to choose among six New American Schools designs plus two additional reform models. The district leadership felt

these eight reform models showed the best fit with district goals and the needs of typical Memphis schools. The NAS designs adopted in Memphis schools in the 1995-96 school year were ATLAS, Audrey Cohen College, Co-nect, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, Modern Red Schoolhouse, and Roots and Wings. The two independent reform models were Accelerated Schools (Hopfenberg & Levin, 1993) and Paideia (Adler, 1984).

All models except Roots and Wings, which is restricted to the elementary grades, were developed to be applicable to all educational levels including high school. More detail on these eight reform models is available at the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform Web site, www.goodschools.gwu.edu. In addition, New American Schools designs are discussed by Stringfield, Ross, and Smith (1996).

Elements common to all eight models include the adoption of high-level performance standards for students; strong teacher involvement and buy-in; greatly increased, site-based professional development and planning time; and increased use of performance assessments where students demonstrate their learning rather than simply answer objective questions. Most expressly include cooperative learning, thematic units (projects or extended activities revolving around a guiding question), student-centered instruction, integrated curricula, increased technology use, and community and family connections to schools (Ross, Henry et al., 1997).

Reform Models Adopted in Memphis

The various models differ.

- ATLAS establishes a pathway across feeder schools while promoting use of "authentic learning" activities (e.g., real-world events affecting learners' lives).
- Audrey Cohen College orients learning activities around specific "purposes" (e.g., "technology to meet human needs") for each semester in each grade.

  Co-NECT emphasizes integrating computer technology with project-based learning.
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound engages students in "expeditions" consisting of cooperative learning projects that integrate content from different subjects, such as mathematics, language arts, social studies, and art.
- Modern Red Schoolhouse individualizes student progress through different educational levels (as opposed to conventional grades), while using the Core Knowledge curriculum (Hirsch, 1996).
- Roots & Wings is distinguished by its inclusion of the widely used Success for All reading program (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996) along with a learner-centered math program (MathWings) based on cooperative learning and problem solving, and integrated curriculum units (WorldLab).
- Accelerated Schools involves teachers in defining and addressing major goals for the schools, using collaborative decision making, and engaging students in "powerful learning"(i.e., learning that is active and meaningful to students).
- Paideia also strongly emphasizes student-centered learning (as opposed to teacher-directed instruction), featuring teachers as "coaches" and students engaging in Socratic questioning.

Schoolwide, Districtwide Implementation

During the months that followed the formation of the NAS-Memphis partnership, selected or volunteer staff at each school examined the different models and attended a "restructuring exposition" that featured presentations by the model developers (see Ross, Henry et al., 1997). At the same time, systematic research on the Memphis reform initiative began with a longitudinal national study by the RAND Corporation (Bodilly, Keltner, Purnell, Reichardt, & Schuyler, 1998) and a local study by the University of Memphis Center for Research in Educational Policy and Johns Hopkins partnership (Ross, Henry et al., 1997; Ross, Troutman et al., 1997; Stringfield, Datnow, Herman, & Berkeley, 1997). Research continued for the next five years (e.g., Bol et al., 1998; Bol, Nunnery, Stephenson, & Mogge, 2000; Ross, Alberg et al., 2000; 2001; Smith et al., 1998).

In May 1995, two months after Memphis was announced as an NAS scale-up jurisdiction, 58 Memphis schools submitted "letters of intent" to implement one of the eight identified models, and, after review by a team of central administrators, 34 were chosen to participate in first-year implementation (Ross, Henry et al., 1997). Of these, 25 were either elementary or elementary/middle schools. A second group of 14 schools (12 elementary) was added during the summer of 1996. The majority of these were drawn from schools that had not been selected in Year 1, and re-applied in Year 2. At the time the models were selected, Memphis City Schools, design teams, New American Schools, and the University of Memphis Center for Research in Educational Policy engaged in efforts to provide schools with information about the models (Ross, Henry et al., 1997). However, given the time constraints and the newness of the systemic reform effort, systematic research and needs assessments were not conducted by the individual schools.

Implementation costs for these first two cohorts of schools were predominantly provided by the school district, with supplemental support from New American Schools. By 1997, however, schools were required to use their existing site-based management funds to implement their chosen reform models. This shift from district-level to school-level funding placed additional strain on teachers and principals and their ability to reallocate existing funds or find the resources needed to restructure their schools' academic programs (Bol et al., 1998). Still, research by RAND (e.g., Bodilly et al., 1998) and the Memphis-Johns Hopkins group (Smith et al., 1998) showed that enthusiasm and implementation quality remained high at most of the schools. Seemingly, a key factor was that most school staffs in the first three years (1995-98) were freely choosing models they genuinely believed could improve teaching and learning at their schools (Smith et al., 1998).

Specifically, when "value-added" achievement gain scores for restructuring elementary schools were compared to those for matched control schools . . . statistically significant and educationally important advantages were shown for the restructuring.

Results show promise. Extensive classroom visits using systematic observation measures and structured teacher interviews were conducted at all schools that adopted reform models in the 1995 and 1996 groups. Results suggested that teaching and learning were becoming more active in the restructuring schools compared to control schools (Ross, Alberg, Wang, Lowther & Smith, 2001). Among the specific strategies showing increased use in the restructuring schools were cooperative learning, project-based learning, and application of technology as a teaching tool. The overall impression was that instruction was becoming more student-centered and engaging relative to the pre-reform years (Smith et al., 1998)

If, in fact, the quality of instruction was improving, gains in student achievement might also be anticipated, but how quickly? Realistically, given the many variables that contribute to student achievement and the complexity of translating reform concepts into substantive schoolwide changes, the typical expectancy for a reforming elementary school to demonstrate tangible achievement increases might be as long as five years (Fullan, 2001). For middle schools and high schools, the typical wait is longer. Thus, what happened after two years in Memphis (Ross et al., 2001a and 2001b) immediately caught national attention from both researchers and practitioners. Specifically, when *"value-added"* achievement gain scores for restructuring elementary schools were compared to those for matched control schools in the district and all other elementary schools in the state, statistically significant and educationally important advantages were shown for the restructuring group.

Value-added scores, used for detecting growth in student learning, can show differences in program effects that would otherwise be obscured by other variables (e.g., student socioeconomic status).

Tennessee adopts value-added assessment. To understand the uniqueness of the value-added achievement analyses compared to those of conventional studies, some brief background on the Tennessee state-mandated assessment is needed. Achievement data for the Memphis study were derived from scores on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) for five subjects (math, reading, language, science, and social studies) over three years of testing (1998-2000). TCAP is a form of the CTBS/5 or "Terra Nova" edition (CTB/MacMillan/McGraw Hill, 1997).

Year-to-year gains on the TCAP were computed using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), developed by William Sanders and his colleagues at the University of Tennessee (Sanders & Horn, 1995a, 1995b). The particular measure used was the Cumulative Percent of the Norm mean or CPN. A detailed explanation of how value-added scores are derived would be well beyond the scope of this report. However, given that similar measures are being used or considered by other states (e.g., Colorado), readers may be interested in a brief overview. The overview would also be helpful in understanding some key results, to be presented later.

The CPN statistic indicates across all grades reported (in the present study, grades 4-5) the percent of the national (expected) gain attained. For example, if School A had a CPN gain of 100 in math, it would be producing achievement gains that were equal to 100% of the national or expected gain for that subject; a CPN of 50 would indicate that only half (50%) of the national gain was attained. Value-added scores, used for detecting growth in student learning, can show differences in program effects that would otherwise be obscured by other variables (e.g., student socioeconomic status). For example, a school serving a very disadvantaged student population may make tremendous progress in moving its average student from the 16th to the 25th percentile. But it might still appear very unsuccessful relative to a "middle-class" school that has remained stagnant at the 70th percentile for the past four years. Accordingly, when the achievement outcomes for the Memphis restructuring schools are examined solely in terms of traditional measures, such as mean percentile scores, the growth pattern looks flat and unimpressive (Ross, Sanders, Wright, Stringfield, Wang, & Alberg, 2001b). There was some positive movement by the schools that adopted the reform models, but the mean percentile scores across schools remained in the mid-30's, clearly below the state average and close to the bottom of all Tennessee school districts. A problem in districts, such as Memphis, that have

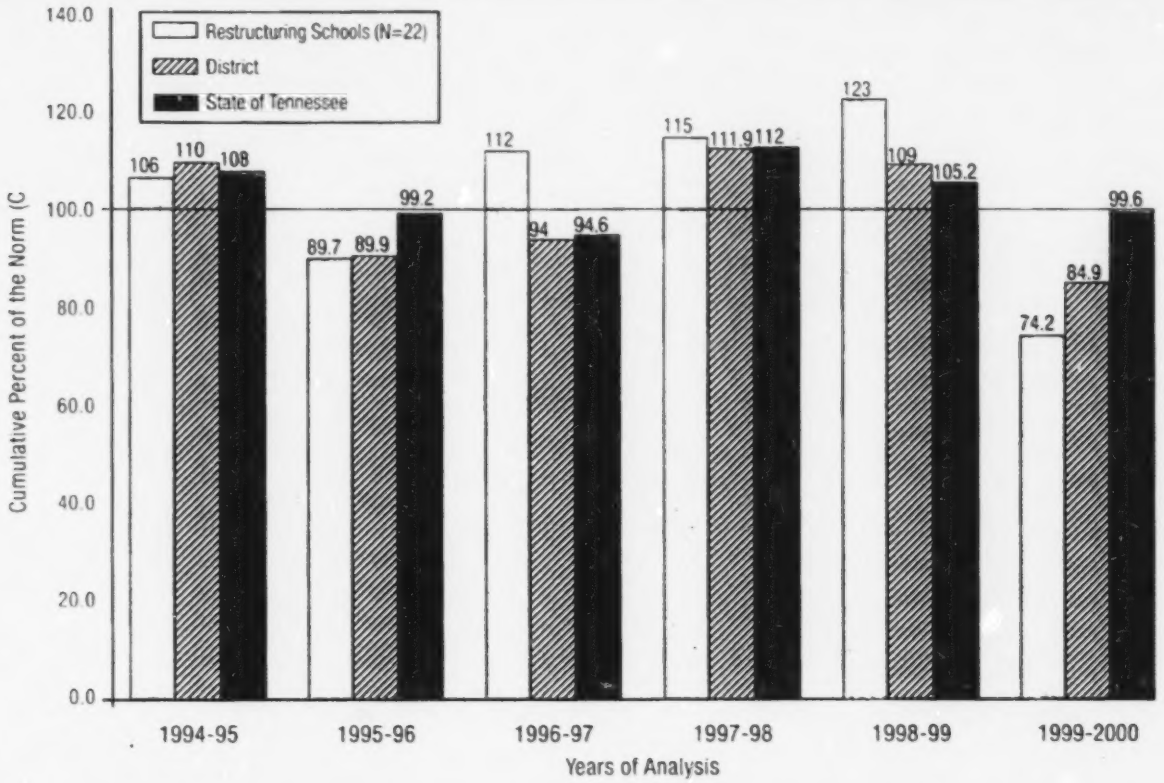

Figure 1. Value-Added Gains Among 22 Restructuring Schools vs. District's Remaining Elementary Schools vs. State Norms

high levels of poverty and high student mobility (many of the students who are tested in the higher grades have had only limited exposure to the reform program) is that the effects of one program can be intermixed with many other factors, leaving a cloudy picture regarding what works.

The value-added analyses, by examining gains at the individual student and whole-school levels, provides a different lens for detecting improvement in student achievement. Figure 1 illustrates the most recent results, showing longitudinal outcomes for 22 elementary schools that began restructuring in 1995 compared to the remaining district elementary schools and the state norms, from 1994-95 (pre-reform) to 1999-2000[3]. Note that, because test forms change from year to year, the most accurate way to examine the results is to compare reform ("restructuring") schools vs. the district vs. the state within the same years.

As shown in the figure, after only two years of reform efforts, the 1995 cohort of schools was demonstrating the highest gains (see 1996-97), a trend that continued in 1997-98 and 1998-99. The same pattern—negative or no results after one year but relative advantages in the second year—was replicated, although not as strongly, for the subsequent 1996 and 1997 cohorts of Memphis schools. (Readers who are interested in more detail on these studies should see Ross, Sanders, Wright, Stringfield, Wang and Alberg, 2001a and 2001b.) Positive advantages on the standardized test so early in the Memphis initiative were unexpected based on past experiences with reform (Fullan, 2001). That the positive trends were sustained for the next three years added credence to the belief that many schools were being successfully transformed.

The reform effort expands. Based on the promising results in 1996-97, the district mandated that all schools adopt reform models—either externally developed or locally developed (site-based). By the fall of 1998, all Memphis schools were implementing one of 18 different reform models. This last step ended the voluntary nature of the restructuring initiative.

Public interest was substantial, as was local support from the teachers' union, the school board, and business and community leaders. In January 1997, Memphis hosted the Tenth International Congress of School Effectiveness and School Improvement, an event that attracted the largest attendance in the conference's history. The national Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, a federal grant initiative started in 1998 with strong influence from the Memphis outcomes (Mirel, 2001), also flourished as districts and schools in every state looked to comprehensive school reform with high hopes.

Although the emphasis . . . is on building capacity in low-performing schools, the external review team can recommend personnel changes if deemed appropriate.

Sustaining Reform Proves Challenging

The expansion of the restructuring in 1998-99 from 70 to 161 schools put Memphis on the map as the only New American Schools jurisdiction to implement full systemic reform. It also introduced some policy decisions that appeared to increasingly weaken the reform initiative over time. First, the obviously large number of restructuring schools and the multiple models being used appeared to dilute the district's already stretched ability to support individual schools' efforts. Second, the district requirement that all schools adopt reforms unavoidably included relatively high-performing schools that didn't want to change their approaches as well as very low-performing schools with high teacher mobility, less capable principals, and limited capacity for making substantive changes (Ross, Alberg et al., 2001). Neither group seemed to be in as strong a position as the earlier schools to implement the reform models.

Voluntary vs. Mandate. From Superintendent House's perspective (personal communication, September 2001), the district did not mandate the adoption of externally developed comprehensive school reform models; rather, schools were given considerable flexibility to develop site-based reforms by integrating local and external programs. But, when teachers and principals were interviewed over the years, the general perception seemed quite different (Ross, Alberg, Wang, Lowther, & Smith, 2001). Many conveyed the belief that the external models (especially a select few) were "favored" by the central administration. Teacher focus groups in the longitudinal study by Ross, Alberg et al. (2001) frequently reported that such models were often hastily selected by schools without a true understanding of their focus or need for staff buy-in.

Sustaining high interest and maintaining quality. In the fall of 1999, Superintendent House, and a few months later Associate Superintendent Dale Kalkofen, announced plans to leave the district. Concommitantly, during the 1999-2000 school year, commitment to the reform efforts at many schools diminished. While reduced enthusiasm did not occur at all schools, it was more pervasive at schools that adopted models after the districtwide mandate (Ross, Alberg, Wang, Lowther, & Smith, 2001). According to district staff members (including former design facilitators) who were interviewed, one apparent result of these actions was reduced quality in the implementation of the designs at many schools. Another was more vocal opposition to the reforms.

Nonetheless, as Figure 1 illustrates, despite the positive perspective provided by the value-added research (Ross, Sanders et al., 2001a; 2001b),

achievement gains plummeted in 2000 for schools in their fifth year of reform (see 1999-2000 bar graphs). Comparable dips also occurred that year for the other reform cohorts and for the district overall.

Perhaps school staffs stopped working as hard once they learned that House and Kalkofen intended to leave. Perhaps reduced intensity and quality of the services provided by the model developers negatively impacted implementation. Perhaps the high teacher mobility in the district (more than 20%) made continual professional development and buy-in to the reform models too difficult to sustain. Or, perhaps the strong value-added results of the earlier years had taken restructuring schools close to the limit of reasonably attainable gains, thereby statistically accentuating lack of growth in the "off" year of 2000. Whatever interpretations are favored, it seems likely that the quality and sustainability of the district initiative had been significantly weakened by the fifth year (1999-2000).

Interestingly, the states' testing programs all include open-ended questions, performance tests, and/or portfolios of students' work, in addition to more traditional multiple-choice tests.

Lessons Learned

What lessons can be learned to avoid problems that might have produced that decline and, in the process, increase success of future reform efforts?

Comprehensive school reform is no magic formula for success. Comprehensive reform is a framework and process for change stimulated by emphasis on improving teaching and learning; increasing parent involvement; establishing and achieving high student-performance standards; and providing teachers with sufficient professional development, planning time, and resources. If used effectively, comprehensive school reform can develop a sense of community and positive expectations in schools that have not been realizing success. However, the notion that merely adopting a comprehensive reform model will raise achievement scores in a year or two (or ever) is unrealistic, it seems, unless (a) the model is fully implemented as designed and (b) school climate and the quality of instruction improve as a result.

One size does not fit all. When the district mandated that all schools adopt reform models, interest in school improvement as the primary goal diminished and satisfying a perceived "top-down" requirement became more prominent. Likely consequences were that school staffs (a) made less reflective choices of designs to best match school needs, (b) felt less ownership of the restructuring process, and (c) resented the pressure being applied. Backlash against the mandate was especially strong among the district's optional (magnet) schools. As a group, these schools enjoyed special status. They attracted more capable students, stronger principals, more effective teachers, and more informed and vocal parents. The feeling at most of these schools was that they were already doing a good job and demonstrating successful student achievement outcomes. Their general response to the mandate was to search for the reform models that would be the least expensive and intrusive.[4]

A lesson learned from this experience is that districts and states should not require all schools to adopt reform models. Seemingly, a more productive strategy is to charge each school with demonstrating clear evidence of success (as defined by the state) or, if that evidence is lacking, to devise a credible plan for change. Such a plan should include external assistance and be based on a systematic needs assessment that incorporates data collection and analyses of school climate, student achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction (e.g., parents, community members, staff).

Teacher buy-in is critical to success. No

matter how potentially effective a comprehensive model is, ultimately the teachers must make it work. Although every Memphis school was required to obtain a majority vote of teachers endorsing the selected model (usually 70% to 80%), strong buy-in was lacking at some schools, especially those that were adopting a design to comply to a mandate. Disgruntled teachers frequently said they voted for the design because they were told "they had to" (Ross, Alberg et al., 2001). If all teachers are not fully part of the decision-making process, interest in sustaining the reform effort will wane as teachers and administrative staff change over time.

Using too many models stretches district capacity. In an effort to give schools greater autonomy in selecting reform models, the Memphis administration mandate established an open process in which adoption of any model (whether externally or internally developed) using "research-based" components could be proposed for district approval. While some requests were turned down on the basis of perceived weaknesses in the proposed models, by the school year 1999-2000, 18 different models were being used in the district. Despite the advantage of adaptability to individual school preferences, major drawbacks of offering so many choices appeared to be the difficulties of (a) accommodating teachers and students who transfered from a school where reform philosophies and pedagogies differed; (b) providing district support, particularly the alignment of district-provided professional development, for so many different approaches; (c) monitoring, at the district level, the effectiveness of the effort and the capacity of the model developer to provide quality service; and (d) coordinating the curricula and instructional approaches from the diverse models to address state testing standards. In retrospect, a more effective policy might have been to select a smaller pool of reform models that aligned with state and district goals and objectives and to require only the clearly failing schools to seek external assistance.

Associate reforms with schools, not with administrators. An incidental outcome of the Memphis story was the abundant national and local attention given the superintendent for her accomplishments in leading the reform initiative. In 1998, House was named "Tennessee Superintendent of the Year," and in 1999 she was selected as "National Superintendent of the Year" by the American Association for School Administrators. Unfortunately, Memphis teachers and principals increasingly perceived their efforts as mostly serving to advance the reputations of district leaders rather than helping them or their schools (Ross, Alberg et al., 2001). A related concern was future sustainability, given that new superintendents and principals frequently want the freedom to put their own marks on improvement initiatives. While public recognition of educational leaders is certainly important, accomplishments in enacting reforms need to be primarily associated with the schools. Broad-based, distributed leadership and responsibility for the reforms at both the school and district levels seem likely to further the latter goal.

Provide credible and high-quality training. Despite the success of most Memphis schools in implementing the reform designs, some schools struggled for a variety of reasons. A common problem for low-implementing schools was receiving training that lacked credibility or usefulness to teachers (Bodilly et al., 1998; Ross, Alberg et al., 2001). Many model developers were in the process of "scaling up" nationally, which necessitated hiring new coaches to meet the increased training demands of adopting schools. Unfortunately, not all coaches were knowledgeable about the school contexts (e.g., inner-city education) or highly skilled in the strategies being taught. The most graphic example from the author's personal experience with the Memphis reform initiative was a

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school whose primary coach was a young man who had just completed his master's degree at a prestigious northeastern college but had never taught in a K-12 context. His "students" were part of one of the most experienced and skilled teaching staffs in the entire district. The relationship was strained from the beginning, implementation floundered, and the design was discontinued one year later. Teachers need to see the professional development associated with the reform as useful and relevant.

District role in school readiness. The Memphis experience should encourage district and state leaders to establish processes for readying a school for change. As several team leaders have since acknowledged, some Memphis schools were not ready to undertake extensive reform due to weak leadership, low teacher support, or insufficient resources. Not surprisingly, these schools became only "nominal" implementers, low achievers, and negative examples for the particular reform model and the overall district initiative. Such schools might have been better served by learning more about the design, performing a needs assessment to determine readiness for change, and/or adopting targeted interventions (e.g., a reading or tutoring program) that require less capacity to implement successfully.

Schools need to be the owners and keepers of the reform. The most salient theme throughout this report is the importance of school ownership of the reform. Principals and teachers must be committed to reform design and maintenance. "Maintenance" has historically proven especially challenging for schools and districts. Systematic formative evaluation—which produces data for decision making and school improvement—is frequently not available and rarely used.[5] Likely reasons include lack of time or expertise to conduct evaluations, subjectivity of self-evaluation, and an aversion to evaluation in general and its often negative connotations. Consequently, evaluation data often produce reactivity and defensiveness rather than ownership.

With comprehensive school reform, the school community, policymakers, and other important stakeholders justifiably expect immediate and tangible results, typically improved test scores. What is often lost is the idea that before student learning improves, positive transformations in teaching, curriculum, and school climate are needed and can be detected.

Conclusion

This chapter in the Memphis restructuring initiative reflects the lessons learned—some painful, some not. But they are essential lessons in how to create a critical mass for sustainable, quality systemic reform.

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Footnotes

[1]The findings and opinions in this technical report are based on the author's unique experiences as one of the original planners (with Superintendent House and Dr. Sam Stringfield, senior scientist at Johns Hopkins University) of the Memphis reform initiative, and as project director for five years of multiple studies of schools implementations of the reform models and of student achievement results in Memphis City Schools. The citations in this report identify technical reports and published studies of the research and findings. In connection with these multiple roles, the author spent considerable time at meetings and in conversations with district administrators, including former Superintendent Gerry House, former Associate Superintendent Dale Kalkofen, and school principals. Notes of the main issues discussed are part of the data base for this report and for additional studies conducted by the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at The University of Memphis. Recently, as part of a study commissioned by New American Schools, CREP researchers and the author interviewed key informants from Memphis City Schools (principals and former CSR model facilitators) who collectively corroborated the qualitative impressions presented here and provided additional perspectives for an upcoming report on successful and unsuccessful schools (Ross, Tabachnick, & Sterbinsky, in press).

[2] Dean Millot from New American Schools estimates that direct investments in the Memphis reform initiative from 1995 to 2001 totaled $12 million, with an additional indirect investment of $24-36 million in staff time.

[3] There were too few high schools and middle schools in each cohort to allow valid comparisons; thus, the value-added results were based on elementary schools only.

[4] The basis for this assertion was the author's participation, as an invited "consultant," at two informal meetings arranged by the optional school principals in February, 1998. As a group, the principals expressed strong concerns that the models would disrupt their present programs, and wanted advice about designs that would be acceptable to the central administration but least costly and interfering.

[5] Recognizing the challenges for individual schools to conduct their own formative evaluations, AEL and the Center for Research in Educational Policy at the University of Memphis have been collaborating for the past three years to make quality evaluation results available to schools. Key elements of this assistance include (a) multiple data sources (e.g., classroom observations, school climate, implementation progress, teacher reactions, etc.) from multiple years, (b) a third-party report, (c) confidentiality, (d) practicality, and (e) school ownership of the data. The culminating element is guiding school staffs in using the data along with achievement results to improve programs; set priorities; create a community of practice; and, where successes are indicated, tell their stories. Without such success stories, the fate of a reform and the morale of teachers may rest solely on gains in student achievement test results, which may be years away.

Note: The author, Dr. Steven M. Ross, is director of the Center for Research in Educational Policy and holds the Lillian and Morrie Moss Chair of Excellence in Urban Education at the University of Memphis. Since 1995, he and his colleagues have conducted studies on the effectiveness of the Memphis schools' adoption of reform models.

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